

Statement

of

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on

HR23

Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2007

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

April 18, 2007

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS:

Thank you for allowing me to address you.

I've been the Public Relations Director of the American Merchant Marine Veterans, Inc. since 1993; I joined to honor my husband's memory, and have dedicated my efforts to gaining RECOGNITION, RESPECT and REMEMBRANCE, for those American Mariners who served from 1941-1946.

In 1939, at age 17, my husband dropped out of high school and joined the Merchant Marine as a MESSMAN. Our Merchant ships were already being torpedoed and Seamen were needed. In 1941, he tried to enlist in the Navy but was rejected because of a Rheumatic Heart. He was told to attend Pensacola Naval Academy UPGRADE SCHOOL and return to the Merchant Marine. Upon graduation as FIRST OFFICER, he was immediately transferred to the Army Transportation Corps., where he served on (LTS) ocean-going tugs, until War's end in December, 1946.

By 1946, his heart condition had worsened. His education at Upgrade School was not recognized. His disability made it difficult for him to find employment; doubly so, because he was not considered a Veteran.

By 1941, many Merchant Seamen had already adopted the Sea as their life's work. Many were too old for the Draft. Other young men, like my husband, were ashamed of their disability; ashamed to be called 4F; so when given the opportunity to actively serve their country, they chose the dangers of the Merchant Marine rather than the safety of a defense plant. BY THE WAY - The Maritime Service did not discriminate as to race, religion, nationality, age or HEALTH. Those who chose to

remain as Seamen knew that they faced almost certain death. By war's end, the Maritime Service had lost more men percentage wise than any branch of the Service.

My colleagues here today, have already discussed the sacrifices, privations and indignities suffered by our Mariners during WWII, and the reasons why they deserve to receive a financial consideration.

MY VERY SPECIAL CONCERN is that you may consider eliminating WIDOWS, particularly those whose husbands died before passage of this Bill.

THIS WOULD BE AN INSULT TO THE MEMORY OF THE UNSUNG HERO, and a HEINOUS INJUSTICE to the woman who suffered privation along with him. NOT MANY OF US ARE LEFT!

Firstly, let me say that many of our ancient Mariners either never married, or divorced, or are themselves widowed.

It's also safe to say that 99% of Veteran's wives who became widows during, or immediately after the war, either REMARRIED, or have DIED! The remaining war widows are well over 80, in poor health and facing a very uncertain future. (I know because I'm 84).

Those of us who married American Seamen AFTER the war, married men with physical disabilities, and/or other related injuries. Some married seemingly healthy men who later developed illnesses due to wartime exposure, eg Asbestosis.

Case in point: though we knew each other before, I married John after the war. His heart condition had worsened during his time in service. Once discharged, his Academy training was not recognized, and he was unable to find a job commensurate with his intellectual abilities. After 14 years of marriage, his physical condition forced

him to go on permanent disability. Over a period of 8 years, he suffered two heart attacks, had two open-heart operations, was on dialysis, on special medication, required constant medical care and died in 1978.

Of necessity I had always worked two jobs. Neither before nor after his death, did I receive financial assistance from any source! I buried him privately, took out a loan on our home, paid all the doctor bills, and supported his aged mother until she died two years later. John died in 1978. I received his Honorable Discharge posthumously in 1994. By then, any benefits to which he may have become entitled were for me too little, too late! In 2006 we would have been married over 50 years.

For the most part, we Maritime widows are children of the DEPRESSION. As single women we struggled, - as wives, we did not have the advantage of a husband's education, or a new home in the suburbs or medical benefits of any kind. We worked to supplement our husband's income and to give our children better opportunities. All of us cared for our husbands in sickness and health. When they died, we received no help of any kind because we were not recognized as the WIDOW OF A VETERAN. Our husbands were THE FORGOTTEN HEROES OF THE GREATEST GENERATION. We have been their FORGOTTEN WIDOWS.

HONORABLE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS! PLEASE DO NOT
PERPETUATE THIS TRAVESTY! PLEASE DO NOT COUNT US OUT!

Thank you for your consideration! God Bless You! God Bless America!

Gloria Flora Nicolich